

Client Whisperer

Neutral Joseph Lovretovich draws on 40 years in employment law to connect with parties.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Mediator Joseph M. Lovretovich spent the last 10 years of his more than four decades as an employment litigator handling all the plaintiff intakes at his law firm.

“I talked to plaintiffs every day about what they’d gone through and evaluated whether there is a case or not,” Lovretovich said. “And I was known in my office as ‘the client whisperer’ because sometimes I had to talk plaintiffs off the ledge when they were being unreasonable and unrealistic. And I love doing that as a mediator.”

The son of an LAPD officer, Lovretovich was born and raised in Los Angeles, and he graduated from Southwestern University School of Law in 1973. Although law school was initially his father’s idea, Lovretovich said he knew he’d made the right decision on his first day of class.

“From the day I started, I thought, ‘This is what I want to do,’ and I loved every minute of it,” he recalled. “Even when I retired, I didn’t retire because I didn’t like it anymore. I still love it.”

Lovretovich worked for 46 years as a litigator, tackling employment matters, catastrophic injury and wrongful death cases as well as school bullying lawsuits and legal malpractice disputes. Early in his career, Lovretovich typically represented defendants, but he started focusing primarily on plaintiffs’ work in the late 1990s.

“I felt that on the plaintiff’s side, I could really just devote myself to doing what was needed to win a case, not worrying about how



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much I was billing,” he explained.

All told, Lovretovich said he tried about 50 cases over his four decades as a practicing lawyer.

“I hated getting ready for trial,” he said with a chuckle. “But, boy, when I was in the courtroom trying a case, win or lose, time just ended for me. I just loved it.”

Lovretovich joined Signature Resolution as a full-time private neutral in August 2022, and he’s since handled employment and personal injury mediations. Lovretovich has also started working on an employment discrimination matter as an arbitrator.

Describing his aim as an arbitrator to call it as he sees it, Lovretovich noted, “I’ve had arbitrations that I’ve lost where I thought, ‘Hey, you know what, if it’s a reasoned decision – I disagreed – but you know what, he’s got to call it.’ That’s what I hope I will do when I do these arbitrations.”

Before a mediation, meanwhile, Lovretovich likes to receive briefs from all the parties and to speak over the phone with counsel. He also encourages parties to exchange their briefs before mediation.

“A lot of times I will get facts from one attorney that the other

Joseph M. Lovretovich

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side won't know. Those kind of things can be a non-starter in a mediation because you blindsides somebody, and then they just tend to freeze up," Lovretovich said. "So If I can get those issues in front of the other side early, it gives them a chance to maybe research or talk to their client about a fact pattern. ... It's very helpful, and it speeds mediation along, and it tends to result in a productive mediation versus a mediation that fails in the first hour or so."

Lovretovich likes to begin mediations listening to both sides separately, allowing the parties to share their stories while he works to build rapport and trust with clients.

He said he won't hesitate to share his thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of a case.

"I try to be a combination of a collaborative [and] evaluative mediator. I will tell them what I think.

I'm not one to sugarcoat it," Lovretovich explained. "But I don't try to minimize the case just to minimize it. If I think there's a problem with it, I'll tell the attorney. But if I think he's got a good point, or he's got a good theory, I'll tell him that as well."

Buena Park plaintiffs' attorney Edward Lara has used Lovretovich to resolve two hotly contested employment disputes, and said the mediator helped all the parties navigate through some especially difficult legal issues.

"He's a very genuine evaluator of the cases he works on," Lara said. "He was in the trenches for many years. He won cases; he lost cases. ... So when you take a case to him, you can expect a level of candor that you're not going to get with most mediators. I really valued his ability to tell me the good, bad and the ugly of my cases."

Beverly Hills plaintiffs' attorney Nick Ebrahimian has used Lovretovich to settle an employment discrimination dispute, and said the mediator's extensive background on both sides of the bar is a big positive.

"He's done it all," Ebrahimian said. "When you put all that know-how and experience together in a bag, you get someone who is a seasoned, seasoned litigator who did both defense work and plaintiffs' work, and that gives him the ability to connect really, really well with both sides."

Irvine defense attorney Michael D. Thomas has used Lovretovich twice as a mediator, and he agreed that the Signature neutral's considerable litigation experience brings an especially useful perspective to dispute resolution. Thomas also said Lovretovich was terrific with clients.

"Joe is great with building rapport," Thomas explained. "But that has to be genuine. You can't fake it. ... Before people are willing to settle, they must feel that their interests and their business – because we're on the management side – is fully understood. And it's only at that point that the mediator can reframe a problem or even float creative solutions. And Joe's really good – largely based on experience – at building that trust and sharing his perspective with the parties."

Here are some attorneys who have used Lovretovich's services: Nick Ebrahimian, Lavi & Ebrahimian LLP; Michael D. Thomas, Jackson Lewis PC; Edward Lara, Lara & Luna APC; Jonathan M. Genish, Blackstone Law; Ryan L. Eddings, Littler Mendelson PC.

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